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SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: ITALY HESITANT ON MAURITANIA SANCTIONS, WANTS TO
MAINTAIN DIALOG

REF: STATE 13962

Classified By: A/Pol M/C Liam Wasley for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Poloff delivered reftel points to MFA West Africa Office Director Pierluigi Verlani February 18, urging Italy to press for a principled EU position supporting a return to democracy and constitutional order in Mauritania, given the African Union's February 5 decision to impose targeted sanctions on Mauritania. Verlani said Africa DG Morabito was on his way back from an EU coordinating meeting in Brussels, and he did not know the substance of those discussions, but said that Italy generally opposed sanctions in the case of Mauritania, which he said would only further impoverish the population and isolate the country.

¶2. (C) Although Italy denounced the coup d'etat when it occurred and does not support the Junta, Verlani said it was important to maintain dialog with the de facto authorities in order to encourage an eventual return to constitutional rule. He pointed out that Junta FM Mohamedou had written to AU Peace and Security Commission President Ping February 12 promising that the Junta was planning June elections, which he saw as an encouraging sign. Verlani said it was better to encourage legitimate, free and fair elections than to isolate and stigmatize the Junta, which might encourage its leader to dig in their heels. Verlani also said Italy wanted to maintain stability in Mauritania, because a security vacuum could make it a haven for trafficking in drugs, weapons, and people, risks that Italy felt particularly because of its geographic proximity.

¶3. (C) Poloff pointed out that it was important to send a signal, to the Junta and to Mauritania's neighbors, that the Junta's rule was illegitimate and that its plan for early elections was simply an attempt to consolidate power and grant it the appearance of legitimacy. Verlani said we should acknowledge that President Abdallahi was a flawed leader, and that it was unrealistic to insist upon a return to the status quo ante.
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